

Presidential Address

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Fifty-Third Session

Ramgarh, March 1940

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FROM
THE ORIGINAL HINDUSTANI



ABUL KALAM AZAD

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Friends,

In 1923 you elected me President of this National Assembly. For the second time, after seventeen years, you have once again conferred upon me the same honour. Seventeen years is not a long period in the history of national struggles. But now the pace of events and world change is so rapid that our old standards no longer apply. During these last seventeen years we have passed through many stages, one after another. We had a long journey before us and it was inevitable that we should pass through several stages. We rested at many a point no doubt, but never stopped. We surveyed and examined every prospect but we were not ensnared by it and passed on. We faced many ups and downs but always our faces were turned towards the goal. The world may have doubted our intentions and determination but we never had a moment's doubt. Our path was full of difficulties and at every step we were faced with great obstacles. It may be that we did not proceed as rapidly as we desired but we did not flinch from marching forward. If we look back upon the period between 1923 and 1940, nineteen-twenty-three will appear to us a faded landmark in the distance. In 1923 we desired to reach our goal but the goal was so distant then that even the milestones were hidden from our eyes. Raise your eyes to-day and look ahead. Not only do you see the milestones clearly but the goal itself is not

distant. But this is evident that the nearer we get to the goal the more intense does our struggle become. Although the rapid march of events has taken us further from our old landmark and brought us nearer our goal, yet it has created new troubles and difficulties for us. To-day our caravan is passing a very critical stage. The essential difficulty of such a critical period lies in its conflicting possibilities. It is very probable that a correct step may bring us very near our goal, and on the other hand, a false step may land us in fresh troubles and difficulties.

At such a critical juncture you have elected me President and thus demonstrated the great confidence you have in one of your co-workers. It is a great honour and a great responsibility. I am grateful for the honour and crave your support in shouldering the responsibility. I am confident that the fullness of your confidence in me will be a measure of the fullness of the support that I shall continue to receive.

THE REAL PROBLEM OF THE DAY

I think that I should now come straight to the real problem before us without further delay.

The first and the most important question before us is this: Whither is the step taken by us in consequence of the declaration of War on the 3rd September, 1939, leading us? And where do we stand now?

Probably in the history of the Congress, the 1936 session at Lucknow marked a new ideological phase, when the Congress passed a long resolution on the international

situation and placed its viewpoint clearly and categorically before the public. After this a consideration of the international situation, and a resolution thereon, became an essential and integral part of the annual declarations of the Congress. Thus this decision on this subject was arrived at and placed before the world with full deliberation. These resolutions embodied at one and the same time, two declarations to the world: Firstly, we stated, what I have described as a new ideology in Indian politics, that we could not remain in isolation from the political events of the outside world, even in our present state of helplessness. It was essential that while we forged our way ahead and fashioned our future, we must not confine ourselves merely to our own surroundings but should keep a vigilant watch on the conditions of the outside world. Innumerable changes in the world have brought countries and nations nearer to one another; so that the waves of thought and action, rising in one corner of the world, flow and produce immediate reactions in other places. It is therefore impossible to-day for India to consider her problems while confining herself within her own four walls. It is inevitable that events in the outside world should have their repercussions in India; it is equally inevitable that our decisions and the conditions prevailing in India should affect the rest of the world. It was this consciousness and belief which brought about our decisions. We declared by these resolutions against reactionary movements like Fascism and Nazism which were directed against democracy and indivi-

dual and national freedom. These movements were gaining strength day by day and India regarded this as the greatest danger to world progress and peace. India's head and heart were with those peoples who were standing up for democracy and freedom and resisting this wave of reaction.

But while we were considering the dangers arising from Fascism and Naziism, it was impossible for us to forget the older danger which has been proved to be infinitely more fatal to the peace and freedom of nations than these new dangers, and which has in fact supplied the basis for this reaction. I refer to British imperialism. We are not distant spectators of this imperialism, as we are of the new reactionary movements. It has taken possession of our house and dominates over us. It was for this reason that we stated in clear terms that if new entanglements in Europe brought about war, India, which has been debarred from exercising her will and making free decisions, will not take any part in it. She could only consider this question when she had acquired the right of coming to decisions according to her own free will and choice.

India cannot endure the prospect of Naziism and Fascism, but she is even more tired of British imperialism. If India remains deprived of her natural right to freedom, this would clearly mean that British imperialism continued to flourish with all its traditional characteristics, and under such conditions, India would on no account be prepared to lend a helping hand for the triumph of British imperialism. This was the second declaration

which was constantly emphasized through these resolutions. These resolutions were repeatedly passed from the Lucknow session onwards till August 1939 and are known by the name of "War Resolutions."

All these declarations of the Congress were before the British Government when suddenly, in the third week of August 1939, the war clouds gathered and thundered and, at the beginning of September, war began.

At this stage I will ask you to pause for a moment and look back. What were the conditions prevailing in August last?

The Government of India Act of 1935 was imposed upon India forcibly by the British Government and, as usual, resorting to the old stratagem, it tried to make the world believe that it had conferred a big instalment of India's national right upon her. The world knows the decision of the Congress to reject this Act. Nevertheless the Congress decided to avoid a conflict at that stage and preferred a respite. It resolved to take charge of Provincial Governments on a certain definite condition. After this decision the Congress Ministries were functioning successfully in eight out of the eleven Provinces, and it was in the interest of Great Britain herself to maintain this state of affairs for as long a period as possible. There was yet another factor. So far as the War was concerned, India had clearly condemned Nazi Germany. Her sympathies were with the democratic nations, and this was a point in Britain's favour. Under such circumstances, it was natural to expect that

if the British Government had changed its old imperialistic mentality in the slightest degree, it would, even though as a measure of expediency, change its old methods at this juncture and afford an opportunity to India to feel that she was breathing in a changed atmosphere. But we all know how the British Government behaved in this matter. There was not even a shadow of change discernible in its methods. Its policy was dictated exactly in accordance with the habits of an imperialism a hundred and fifty years old. It decided its course of action and, without India being afforded in any manner and in the slightest degree an opportunity to declare freely her opinion, her participation in the War was announced. It was not even considered necessary to give those representative assemblies, imposed upon us by British diplomacy for purposes of show, an opportunity of expressing their opinion.

The whole world knows, and so do we, how all the Empire countries were given freedom of decision; the representative assemblies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, all of them arrived at an independent decision, in regard to their participation in the War, without the least outside interference. Not only this but when Ireland decided to remain neutral, no surprise was shown nor was a single voice raised against it in Great Britain. Mr. De Valera, in the very shadow of England, refused to extend his help to Britain in the War unless the question of Ulster was settled to his satisfaction.

But what place did India occupy in this picture of

the British Commonwealth? India is being told to-day that the generous hand of Britain will confer upon her the precious gift of Dominion Status in the near but unknown future. When the War began, a war which will probably be one of the greatest in the world, India was pushed into it suddenly without her even realising that she was entering it. This fact alone was sufficient to show us which way the wind was blowing. But there was no need for us to hurry. Other opportunities were to come and the time was not distant when we could see the face of British imperialism even more unmasked and at closer quarters.

When in 1914 the first spark was ignited in a corner of the Balkans, England and France raised the cry of the rights of small nations. Later, President Wilson's fourteen points came into view; their fate is well known to the world. On that occasion the situation was different. After the last war, England and France, intoxicated with victory, adopted a course of action which necessarily resulted in a reaction. This reaction grew. It took the shape of Fascism in Italy and Naziism in Germany, and unrestrained dictatorships, based on brute force, challenged the peace and freedom of the world. When this happened, inevitably the world aligned itself in two rival camps: one supporting democracy and freedom; the other encouraging the forces of reaction. And in this way a new picture of the coming war began to take shape. Mr. Chamberlain's Government, to which the existence of Soviet Russia was much more unbearable than the existence of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

and which considered Russia to be a living challenge to British imperialism, continued to watch this situation for three years. Not only this, but by its attitude it clearly and repeatedly encouraged Fascist and Nazi ambitions. Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Albania, disappeared as free countries, one after the other, from the map of the world. And Great Britain, by her vacillating policy, continually assisted in the destruction of their freedom. But when this course of action produced its natural and ultimate result and Nazi Germany marched ahead unchecked, the British Government found itself compelled to enter the arena of war. Had it not done so then, the power of Germany would have become an intolerable menace to British imperialism. Now the new slogans of freedom, world peace, democracy, took the place of the old cry of saving the smaller nations, and the whole world began to ring with these cries. The declaration of war on the 3rd September by Britain and France was made to the accompaniment of the resounding echoes of these slogans. The peoples of the world were bewildered and harassed by the brutal trial of strength and the worldwide unrest created by these new reactionary forces, and they lent a willing ear to the siren voices of these slogans.

THE CONGRESS DEMAND

War was declared on the 3rd of September and on the 7th September the All India Congress Working Committee met at Wardha to deliberate upon the situation. What did the Working Committee do on this occasion?

All the declarations of the Congress made since 1936 were before it. It had also to face the action taken by the British Government in declaring India as a belligerent country. Undoubtedly the Congress could not have been blamed had it come to a final decision in accordance with the logic of the situation. But it continued to keep vigilant watch on its mind and heart; it resisted the natural urge of the moment for an acceleration of pace; it deliberated upon every aspect of the matter, unemotionally and dispassionately, and took the step which today entitles India to raise her head and say to the world that this was the only correct step which could have been then taken. The Congress postponed its final decisions and asked the British Government to state its war aims, for on this depended not only peace and justice for India, but for the whole world. If India was being invited to participate in this war, she had a right to know why this war was being fought. What was its object? If the result of this grim tragedy was not to be the same as that of the last war, and if it was really being fought to safeguard Freedom, Democracy and Peace and to bring a new order to the world, then, in all conscience, India had a right to know, what would be the effect of these aims on her own destiny.

The Working Committee formulated this demand in a long statement which was published on the 14th September, 1939. If I express the hope that this statement will occupy an outstanding place in recent Indian history, I am sure I am not claiming too much of the future historian. This is a simple but irrefutable document,

based on truth and reason, and it can only be set aside by the arrogant pride of armed force. Though this cry was raised in India, in fact it was not of India only, but it was the agonised cry of wronged humanity, whose hopes had so often before been betrayed. Twenty-five years ago the world was plunged into one of the biggest infernos of death and destruction known to history, and yet this was but a preparation for a still bigger catastrophe. The world was bewitched and its hopes were kindled by cries of freedom for small nations, collective security, self-determination, disarmament, Leagues of Nations and international arbitration, and of similar high sounding phrases. But what was the result in the end? Every cry proved false; every vision that seemed so real to us, vanished as a dream. Again nations are being plunged into the blood and fire of war. Should we part with reason and reality so completely as not even to ask why this is being done and how this affects our destiny before plunging into this deluge of death and destruction?

THE ANSWER OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE FIRST STEP OF THE CONGRESS

In answer to this demand of the Congress a regular series of statements were made on behalf of the British Government, both in England and in India. The first link of the series was the Delhi declaration of the Viceroy, dated the 17th October. This lengthy statement is perhaps a finished example of that peculiarly involved and tiring style which characterises the official literature

of the Government of India. After reading page after page of this statement, the curtain is at last lifted with hesitation. We have a glimpse. We are told then that if we want to know the war aims we must read a speech by the Prime Minister of Britain, and this speech deals only with the peace of Europe and with the adjustment of international relations. Even the words "Freedom" and "Democracy" are not to be found in the Viceroy's statement. So far as India is concerned, it only reaffirms the policy laid down in the preamble of the 1919 Act, which is now embodied in the 1935 Act. Today that policy continues to be the same; there is nothing to add to it or to improve it.

On the 17th of October, 1939, the statement of the Viceroy was published and the Working Committee met to deliberate upon it on the 22nd October at Wardha. Without any discussion it came to the conclusion that this reply could under no circumstances be considered satisfactory, and that it should now unhesitatingly give the decision, which it had postponed till then. The decision of the Working Committee was as follows:

"In the circumstances, the Committee cannot possibly give any support to Great Britain, for it would amount to an endorsement of the imperialistic policy which the Congress has always sought to end. As a first step in this direction, the Committee call upon the Congress Ministries to tender their resignations."

As a result of this decision the Congress Ministries in eight Provinces resigned.

This was but the first step which the Congress took in the series of events. Now we have to see to what these events led. The communique of the Viceroy issued on the 5th February from Delhi giving the resume of the talk between him and Mahatma Gandhi, and Mahatma Gandhi's statement of the 6th February may be regarded as the last of this series. We all know the substance of the Viceroy's statement. The British Government, it is stated, fully desires that India should, in the shortest time possible under the circumstances, attain the status of a British dominion, and that the transition period should be as short as possible. But it is unwilling to concede to India the right of framing her own constitution and deciding her own destiny through her own elected representatives without outside interference. In other words, the British Government does not accept the position that India has got the right of self-determination.

At the first touch of reality the structure of make-belief fell to pieces. For the last four years the world resounded with cries of democracy and freedom. The utterances of the most responsible spokesmen of England and France in this regard are so fresh in our memory as not to need recall. But the moment India raised this question, the reality behind these utterances was unveiled. Now we are told that, without doubt, safeguarding the freedom of nations is the aim of this war but that this is confined within the geographical limits of Europe. The peoples of Asia and Africa should not dare to have any such hopes. Mr. Chamberlain has made this even

more clear in his Birmingham speech of the 24th February, though we never had any doubts about the matter. He confirmed the British Government's action by his words. Proclaiming British war aims, he stated that they were fighting to secure that small nations in Europe shall henceforth live in security, free from the constant threat of aggression against their independence.

Though this answer about war aims has been given through a British spokesman, yet in reality it interprets the real mentality of Europe as a whole, which has been known to the world for the last two hundred years. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whatever principles were accepted for individual and collective human freedom, the right to claim them and to benefit from them was limited to European nations. And even amongst them, its application was confined to the Christian nations of Europe. Today, in the middle of the twentieth century, the world has so changed that the thoughts and actions of the last century read like ancient history, and appear to us as faded landmarks in the distance. But we will have to admit that there is at least one distinctive landmark of Europe emphasizing human rights, which has not faded and is still with us. We have not passed it yet, or achieved those rights.

This reality has been brought home to us again by the problem of our own political and national rights in India. When, after the declaration of war, we raised the question of war aims and their effect on India's destiny, we were not forgetful of British policy in 1917 and 1919. We wanted to know how in the year 1939, when

the world was covering the track of centuries in the course of days, England looked at India. Had that look changed? We were given a clear reply that it had not; even now there was no change in that imperialist outlook. We are told to believe that the British Government is very desirous that India should attain the status of a dominion, in the shortest possible period. We knew even before that the British Government had expressed this desire. Now we know that they are very anxious indeed.

But it is not a question of the desire or of the measure of the desire of the British Government. The straight and simple question is of India's right; whether she is entitled to determine her own fate or not. On the answer to this question depend the answers to all other questions of the day. This question forms the foundation stone of the Indian problem; India will not allow it to be removed, for if it is displaced, the whole structure of Indian nationalism will collapse.

So far as the question of war is concerned our position is quite clear. We see the face of British imperialism as clearly now as we did in the last war, and we are not prepared to assist in its triumph by participating in the War. Our case is crystal clear. We do not wish to see British imperialism triumphant and stronger and thus lengthen the period of our own subjection to it. We absolutely refuse to do so. Our way lies patently in the opposite direction.

WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

Let us return to our starting point and consider once again whither the step that we took after the declaration of war on the 3rd September is leading us. Where do we stand today? The answer to both these questions is by this time apparent to your minds and is hovering on your lips. It is not even necessary that your lips should tell me for I feel the quivering of your hearts. The step of temporary and partial cooperation which we took in 1937, we withdrew after the declaration of War. Inevitably we inclined towards further steps in non-cooperation. As we stand today, we have to decide whether we should march forward in this direction or go backward. When once a step is taken, there is no stopping. To cry halt, is to go back, and we refuse to go back. We can only, therefore, go forward. I am sure that the voice of every one of you joins mine when I proclaim that we must and will go forward.

MUTUAL SETTLEMENT

In this connection one question naturally faces us. It is the verdict of history that in a struggle between nations, no power forgoes its possessions unless compelled to do so. Principles of reason and morality have affected the conduct of individuals but have not affected the selfish conduct of Powers that dominate. Today even in the middle of the twentieth century, we witness how the new reactionary forces in Europe have shattered man's faith in individual and collective human rights.

In place of justice and reason, brute force has become the sole argument in the determination of rights. But while the world is presenting this depressing picture, there is another side, the hopeful side, which cannot be ignored. We see countless millions all over the world, without any distinction, awakening to a new consciousness which is spreading everywhere with great rapidity. This new consciousness is tired of the utter hopelessness of the old order, and is impatient for a new order based on reason, justice and peace. This new awakening which arose after the last War and took root in the deepest recesses of the human soul, has now come to dominate men's minds and their utterances. Perhaps there is no parallel in history to the speed of this awakening.

In these circumstances was it beyond the realm of possibility that history should, contrary to its old record, take a new step? Was it impossible that two great peoples of the world, who had been tied together by the course of events as rulers and ruled, should create a new relationship between them, based on reason, justice and peace? If that had been possible, the sorrows born of world war would have given place to a new-born hope; and the new order of reason and justice would have ushered in a new dawn. If the British people could have proudly said to the world today that they had added such a new example to history, what a vast and unparalleled triumph this would have been for humanity. Certainly this was not an impossibility, but it was an amazingly difficult thing to do.

In the prevailing darkness of the times, it is faith in the bright side of human nature which sustains the great soul of Mahatma Gandhi. He is always prepared to take advantage of every opening which might lead to a mutual settlement without feeling that he is weakening his unassailable position.

Since war began, several members of the British Cabinet have tried to make the world believe that the old order of British imperialism has ended, and that today the British nation has no other aims except those of peace and justice. Which country could have more warmly acclaimed such a declaration than India? But the fact is that in spite of these declarations, British imperialism stands in the way of peace and justice today exactly as it did before the War. The Indian demand was the touch-stone for all such claims. They were so tested and found to be counterfeit and untrue.

THE MINORITIES AND THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF INDIA

I have briefly placed before you the real question of the day. That is the vital question for us, all else are subsidiary to it. It was in relation to that question that the Congress put forward its invitation to the British Government in September last, and made a clear and simple demand, to which no community or group could possibly object. It was not in our remotest thoughts that the communal question could be raised in this connection. We realise that there are some groups in the country which cannot keep step with the

Congress in the political struggle or go as far as the Congress is prepared to go; we know that some do not agree with the method of direct action which the great majority of political India has adopted. But so far as the right of the Indian people to independence is concerned and the full admission of India's birthright to freedom, an awakened and impatient India has passed far beyond the early stages, and none dare oppose our demand. Even those classes who cling to their special interests and fear change lest this might affect them adversely, are rendered helpless by the spirit of the times. They have to admit and to agree to the goal we have set before us.

A time of crisis is a testing time for all of us, and so the great problem of the day has tested us and exposed many an aspect of our present-day politics. It has laid bare also the reality that lies behind the communal problem. Repeated attempts were made, both in England and India, to mix up the communal question with the vital political question of the day, and thus to confuse the real issue. Again and again, it was sought to convince the world that the problem of the minorities barred the way to a proper solution of India's political problem.

For a hundred and fifty years British imperialism has pursued the policy of divide and rule, and by emphasising internal differences, sought to use various groups for the consolidation of its own power. That was the inevitable result of India's political subjection, and it is folly for us to complain and grow bitter. A foreign government can never encourage internal unity in the subject country, for disunity is the surest guarantee for

the continuance of its own domination. But when we were told, and the world was asked to believe, that British imperialism had ended, and the long chapter of Indian history dominated by it had closed, was it unreasonable for us to expect that British statesmen would at last give up this evil inheritance and not exploit the communal situation for political ends? But the time for this is yet distant; we may not cling to such vain hopes. So the last five months with their succession of events have established. Imperialism, in spite of all assurances to the contrary, still flourishes; it has yet to be ended.

But whatever the roots of our problems might be, it is obvious that India, like other countries, has her internal problems. Of these, the communal problem is an important one. We do not and cannot expect the British Government to deny its existence. The communal problem is undoubtedly with us, and if we want to go ahead, we must needs take it into account. Every step that we take by ignoring it will be a wrong step. The problem is there; to admit its existence, however, does not mean that it should be used as a weapon against India's national freedom. British Imperialism has always exploited it to this end. If Britain desires to end her imperialistic methods in India and close that dismal chapter of history, then the first signs of this change must naturally appear in her treatment of the communal problem.

What is the Congress position in regard to this problem? It has been the claim of the Congress, from

its earliest beginnings, that it considers India as a nation and takes every step in the interest of the nation as a whole. This entitles the world to examine this claim strictly and the Congress must establish the truth of its assertion. I wish to examine afresh this question from this point of view.

There can be only three aspects of the communal problem: its existence, its importance, and the method of its solution.

The entire history of the Congress demonstrates that it has always acknowledged the existence of the problem. It has never tried to minimise its importance. In dealing with this problem, it followed a policy which was the most suitable under the circumstances. It is difficult to conceive of a different or better course of action. If, however, a better course could be suggested, the Congress was always, and is to-day, eager to welcome it.

We could attach no greater importance to it, than to make it the first condition for the attainment of our national goal. The Congress has always held this belief; no one can challenge this fact. It has always held to two basic principles in this connection, and every step was taken deliberately with these in view.

(1) Whatever constitution is adopted for India, there must be the fullest guarantees in it for the rights and interests of minorities.

(2) The minorities should judge for themselves what safeguards are necessary for the protection of their rights and interests. The majority should

not decide this. Therefore the decision in this respect must depend upon the consent of the minorities and not on a majority vote.

The question of the minorities is not a special Indian problem. It has existed in other parts of the world. I venture to address the world from this platform, and to enquire whether any juster and more equitable course of action can be adopted in this connection, than the one suggested above? If so, what is it? Is there anything lacking in this approach, which necessitates that the Congress be reminded of its duty? The Congress has always been ready to consider any failure in the discharge of its duty. It is so prepared to-day. I have been in the Congress for the last nineteen years. During the whole of this period there is not a single important decision of the Congress in the shaping of which I have not had the honour to participate. I assert that during these last nineteen years, not for a single day did the Congress think of solving this problem in any way other than the way I have stated above. This was not a mere assertion of the Congress, but its determined and decided course of action. Many a time during the last fifteen years, this policy was subjected to the severest tests, but it stood firm as a rock.

The manner in which the Congress has dealt with this problem to-day in connection with the Constituent Assembly, throws a flood of light on these two principles and clarifies them. The recognised minorities have a right, if they so please, to choose their representatives by their votes. Their representatives will not have to

rely upon the votes of any other community except their own. So far as the question of the rights and the interests of the minorities is concerned, the decision will not depend upon the majority of the votes in the Constituent Assembly. It will be subject to the consent of the minority. If unanimity is not achieved on any question, then an impartial tribunal, to which the minorities have also consented, will decide the matter. This last proviso is merely in the nature of a provision for a possible contingency, and is most unlikely to be required. If a more practical proposal is made, there can be no objection to it.

When these principles are accepted and acted upon by the Congress, what is it that obliges British statesmen to remind us so often of the problem of the minorities, and to make the world believe that this stands in the way of Indian freedom? If it is really so, why does not the British Government recognise clearly India's freedom and give us an opportunity to solve this problem for ever by mutual agreement amongst ourselves?

Dissensions were sown and encouraged amongst us, and yet we are taunted because of them. We are told to put an end to our communal conflicts, but opportunity to do so is denied us. Such is the position deliberately created to thwart us; such are the chains that bind. But no difficulties or constraints can deter us from taking the right steps with courage and fortitude. Our path is full of obstacles but we are determined to overcome them.

THE MUSLIMS OF INDIA AND THE FUTURE OF INDIA

We have considered the problem of the minorities of India. But are the Muslims such a minority as to have the least doubt or fear about their future? A small minority may legitimately have fears and apprehensions, but can the Muslims allow themselves to be disturbed by them? I do not know how many of you are familiar with my writings, twenty-eight years ago, in the "Al Hilal". If there are any such here, I would request them to refresh their memories. Even then I gave expression to my conviction, and I repeat this to-day, that in the texture of Indian politics, nothing is further removed from the truth than to say that Indian Muslims occupy the position of a political minority. It is equally absurd for them to be apprehensive about their rights and interests in a democratic India. This fundamental mistake has opened the door to countless misunderstandings. False arguments were built up on wrong premises. This error, on the one hand, brought confusion into the minds of Musalmans about their own true position, and, on the other hand, it involved the world in misunderstandings, so that the picture of India could not be seen in right perspective.

If time had permitted, I would have told you in detail, how, during the last sixty years, this artificial and untrue picture of India was made, and whose hands traced it. In effect, this was the result of the same policy of divide and rule which took particular shape in the minds of British officialdom in India after the Con-

gress launched the national movement. The object of this was to prepare the Musalmans for use against the new political awakening. In this plan, prominence was given to two points. First: that India was inhabited by two different communities, the Hindus and the Musalmans, and for this reason no demand could be made in the name of a united nation. Second: that numerically the Musalmans were far less than the Hindus, and because of this, the necessary consequence of the establishment of democratic institutions in India would be to establish the rule of the Hindu majority and to jeopardise the existence of the Muslims. I shall not go into any greater detail now. Should you, however, wish to know the early history of this matter, I would refer you to the time of Lord Dufferin, a former Viceroy of India, and Sir Auckland Colvin, a former Lieutenant Governor of the N. W. P., now the United Provinces.

Thus were sown the seeds of disunity by British Imperialism on Indian soil. The plant grew and was nurtured and spread its nettles, and even though fifty years have passed since then, the roots are still there.

Politically speaking, the word minority does not mean just a group that is numerically smaller and therefore entitled to special protection. It means a group that is so small in number and so lacking in other qualities that give strength, that it has no confidence in its own capacity to protect itself from the much larger group that surrounds it. It is not enough that the group should be relatively the smaller, but that it should be absolutely so small as to be incapable of protecting its

interests. Thus this is not merely a question of numbers; other factors count also. If a country has two major groups numbering a million and two millions respectively, it does not necessarily follow that because one is half the other, therefore it must call itself politically a minority and consider itself weak.

If this is the right test, let us apply it to the position of the Muslims in India. You will see at a glance a vast concourse, spreading out all over the country; they stand erect, and to imagine that they exist helplessly as a "minority" is to delude oneself.

The Muslims in India number between eighty and ninety millions. The same type of social or racial divisions, which affect other communities, do not divide them. The powerful bonds of Islamic brotherhood and equality have protected them to a large extent from the weakness that flows from social divisions. It is true that they number only one-fourth of the total population; but the question is not one of population ratio, but of the large numbers and the strength behind them. Can such a vast mass of humanity have any legitimate reason for apprehension that in a free and democratic India, it might be unable to protect its rights and interests?

These numbers are not confined to any particular area but spread out unevenly over different parts of the country. In four provinces out of eleven in India there is a Muslim majority, the other religious groups being minorities. If British Baluchistan is added, there are five provinces with Muslim majorities. Even if we are compelled at present to consider this question

on a basis of religious groupings, the position of the Muslims is not that of a minority only. If they are in a minority in seven provinces, they are in a majority in five. This being so, there is absolutely no reason why they should be oppressed by the feeling of being a minority.

Whatever may be the details of the future constitution of India, we know that it will be an all-India federation which is, in the fullest sense, democratic, and every unit of which will have autonomy in regard to internal affairs. The federal centre will be concerned only with all-India matters of common concern, such as, foreign relations, defence, customs, etc. Under these circumstances, can any one who has any conception of the actual working of a democratic constitution, allow himself to be led astray by this false issue of majority and minority. I cannot believe for an instant that there can be any room whatever for these misgivings in the picture of India's future. These apprehensions are arising because, in the words of a British statesman regarding Ireland, we are yet standing on the banks of the river and, though wishing to swim, are unwilling to enter the water. There is only one remedy; we should take the plunge fearlessly. No sooner is this done, we shall realise that all our apprehensions were without foundation.

A BASIC QUESTION FOR INDIAN MUSALMANS

It is now nearly thirty years since I first attempted to examine this question as an Indian Musalman. The

majority of the Muslims then were keeping completely apart from the political struggle and they were influenced by the same mentality of aloofness and antagonism, which prevailed amongst them previously in the year 1888. This depressing atmosphere did not prevent me from giving my anxious thought to this matter, and I reached quickly a final conclusion, which influenced my belief and action. I saw India, with all her many burdens, marching ahead to her future destiny. We were fellow-passengers in this boat and we could not ignore its swift passage through the waters; and so it became necessary for us to come to a clear and final decision about our plan of action. How were we to do so? Not merely by skimming the surface of the problem but by going down to its roots, and then to consider our position. I did so and I realised that the solution of the whole problem depended on the answer to one question: Do we, Indian Musalmans, view the free India of the future with suspicion and distrust or with courage and confidence? If we view it with fear and suspicion, then undoubtedly we have to follow a different path. No present declaration, no promise for the future, no constitutional safeguards, can be a remedy for our doubts and fears. We are then forced to tolerate the existence of a third power. This third power is already entrenched here and has no intention of withdrawing and, if we follow this path of fear, we must needs look forward to its continuance. But if we are convinced that for us fear and doubt have no place, and that we must view the future with courage and confidence in ourselves, then our course of action becomes absolutely clear. We find ourselves in a new world,

which is free from the dark shadows of doubt, vacillation, inaction and apathy, and where the light of faith and determination, action and enthusiasm never fails. The confusions of the times, the ups and downs that come our way, the difficulties that beset our thorny path, cannot change the direction of our steps. It becomes our bounden duty then to march with assured steps to Indian's national goal.

I arrived at this definite conclusion without the least hesitation, and every fibre of my being revolted against the former alternative. I could not bear the thought of it. I could not conceive it possible for a Musalman to tolerate this, unless he has rooted out the spirit of Islam from every corner of his being.

I started the "Al Hilal" in 1912 and put this conclusion of mine before the Muslims of India. I need not remind you that my cries were not without effect. The period from 1912 to 1918 marked a new phase in the political awakening of the Muslims. Towards the end of 1920, on my release after four years of internment, I found that the political ideology of the Musalmans had broken through its old mould and was taking another shape. Twenty years have gone by and much has happened since then. The tide of events has ever risen higher, and fresh waves of thought have enveloped us. But this fact still remains unchanged, that the general opinion amongst the Muslims is opposed to going back.

That is certain; they are not prepared to retrace their steps. But again they are full of doubts about their future path. I am not going into the reasons for this; I shall only try to understand the effects. I would remind my co-religionists that today I stand exactly

where I stood in 1912 when I addressed them on this issue. I have given thought to all those innumerable occurrences which have happened since then; my eyes have watched them, by mind has pondered over them. These events did not merely pass me by; I was in the midst of them, a participant, and I examined every circumstance with care. I cannot be false to what I have myself seen and observed; I cannot quarrel with my own convictions; I cannot stifle the voice of my conscience. I repeat today what I have said throughout this entire period, that the ninety millions of Muslims of India have no other right course of action than the one to which I invited them in 1912.

Some of my co-religionists, who paid heed to my call in 1912, are in disagreement with me today. I do not wish to find fault with them, but I would make appeal to their sincerity and sense of responsibility. We are dealing with the destinies of peoples and nations. We cannot come to right conclusions if we are swept away by the passions of the moment. We must base our judgements on the solid realities of life. It is true that the sky is overcast to-day and the outlook is dark. The Muslims have to come into the light of reality. Let them examine every aspect of the matter again to-day, and they will find no other course of action open to them.

THE MUSLIMS AND A UNITED NATION

I am a Musalman and am proud of that fact. Islam's splendid traditions of thirteen hundred years are my inheritance. I am unwilling to lose even the smallest part of this inheritance. The teaching and history of Islam, its arts and letters and civilisation are my wealth and my

fortune. It is my duty to protect them.

As a Musalman I have a special interest in Islamic religion and culture and I cannot tolerate any interference with them. But in addition to these sentiments, I have others also which the realities and conditions of my life have forced upon me. The spirit of Islam does not come in the way of these sentiments; it guides and helps me forward. I am proud of being an Indian. I am a part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice and without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim.

It was India's historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil, and that many a caravan should find rest here. Even before the dawn of history, these caravans trekked into India and wave after wave of new-comers followed. This vast and fertile land gave welcome to all and took them to her bosom. One of the last these caravans, following the footsteps of its predecessors, was that of the followers of Islam. This came here and settled here for good. This led to a meeting of the culture-currents of two different races. Like the Ganga and Jumna, they flowed for a while through separate courses, but nature's immutable law brought them together and joined them in a *sangam*. This fusion was a notable event in history. Since then, destiny, in her own hidden way, began to fashion a new India in place of the old. We brought our treasures with us, and India too was full of the riches of her own precious heritage. We gave our wealth to

her and she unlocked the doors of her own treasures to us. We gave her, what she needed most, the most precious of gifts from Islam's treasury, the message of democracy and human equality.

Full eleven centuries have passed by since then. Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism. If Hinduism has been the religion of the people here for several thousands of years, Islam also has been their religion for a thousand years. Just as a Hindu can say with pride that he is an Indian and follows Hinduism, so also we can say with equal pride that we are Indians and follow Islam. I shall enlarge this orbit still further. The Indian Christian is equally entitled to say with pride that he is an Indian and is following a religion of India, namely Christianity.

Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour. There is indeed no aspect of our life which has escaped this stamp. Our languages were different, but we grew to use a common language; our manners and customs were dissimilar, but they acted and reacted on each other and thus produced a new synthesis. Our old dress may be seen only in ancient pictures of by-gone days; no one wears it to-day. This joint wealth is the heritage of our common nationality and we do not want to leave it and go back to the times when this joint life had not begun. If there are any Hindus amongst us who desire to bring back the Hindu life of a thousand years ago and more,

they dream, and such dreams are vain fantasies. So also if there are any Muslims who wish to revive their past civilization and culture, which they brought a thousand years ago from Iran and Central Asia, they dream also and the sooner they wake up the better. These are unnatural fancies which cannot take root in the soil of reality. I am one of those who believe that revival may be a necessity in a religion but in social matters it is a denial of progress.

This thousand years of our joint life has moulded us into a common nationality. This cannot be done artificially. Nature does her fashioning through her hidden processes in the course of centuries. The cast has now been moulded and destiny has set her seal upon it. Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity. We must accept the logic of fact and history and engage ourselves in the fashioning of our future destiny.

CONCLUSION

I shall not take any more of your time. My address must end now. But before I do so, permit me to remind you that our success depends upon three factors: unity, discipline and full confidence in Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. The glorious past record of our movement was due to his great leadership, and it is only under his leadership that we can look forward to a future of successful achievement.

The time of our trial is upon us. We have already focussed the world's attention. Let us endeavour to prove ourselves worthy.

THIS PAPER HAS BEEN MANUFACTURED AT
THE ALLAHABAD LAW JOURNAL CO. LTD.

PRINTED BY J. K. SHARMA AT THE ALLAHABAD LAW JOURNAL PRESS
ALLAHABAD AND PUBLISHED BY GENERAL SECRETARY, RECEPTION
COMMITTEE, RAMGARH CONGRESS

